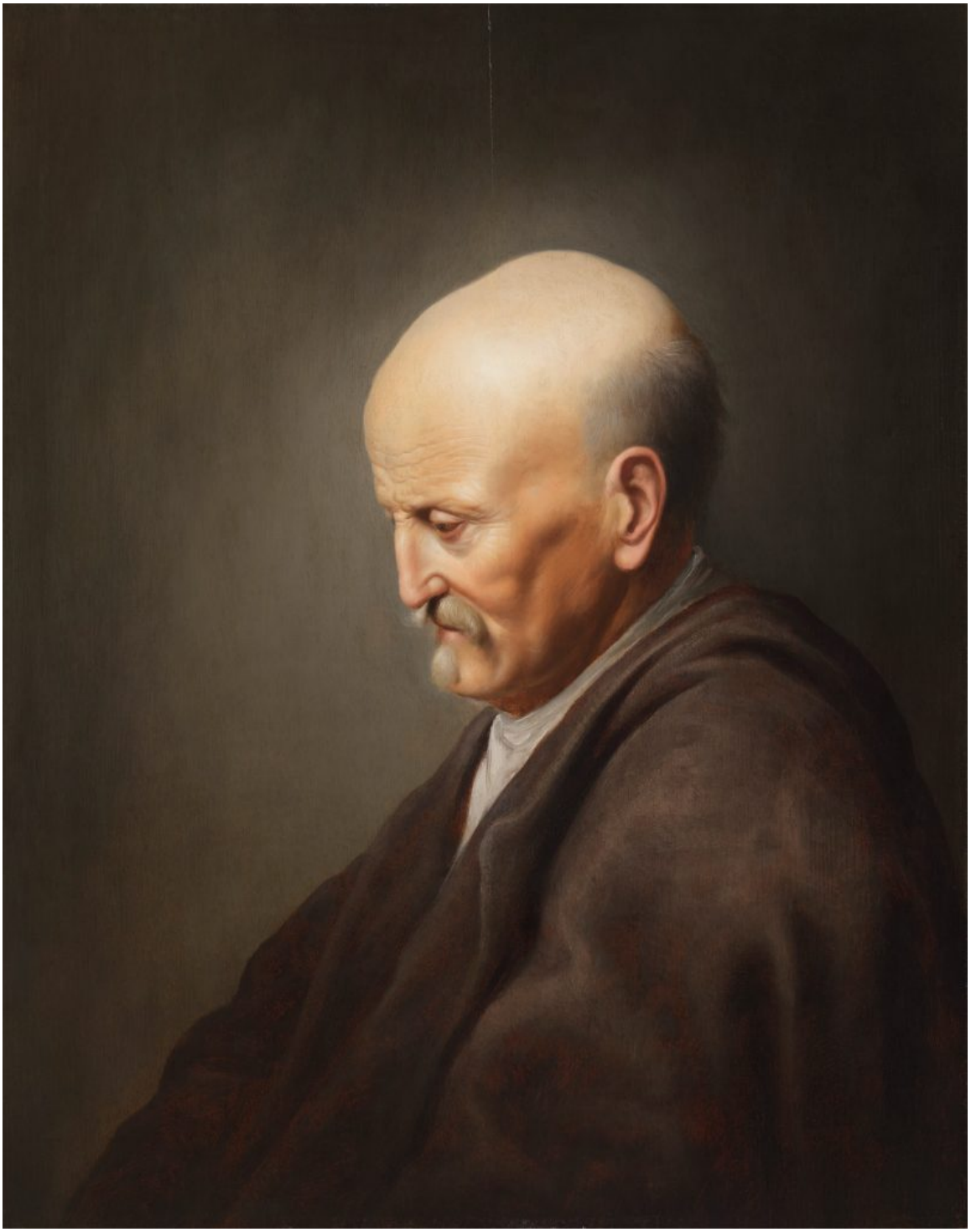
THE LEIDEN COLLECTION



Elderly Man

Leiden School
(Leiden 1613 – 1675 Leiden)

ca. 1630
oil on panel
50.9 x 40.6 cm
GD-109

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Seen in profile, the elderly man seems lost in thought as he gazes quietly downward in a pose echoing the sloped shape of his left shoulder. Intense light reflecting off the sitter's bald head helps draw attention to his finely rendered and precisely articulated features. No attributes identify the sitter, who wears a softly-rendered reddish-brown woolen cloak that covers a simple white shirt visible at the neck. The painting is, in fact, a character study, or *tronie*, probably done from life, rather than a commissioned portrait.

In many respects the clarity of modeling in this well-preserved panel painting is similar to that seen in works by Gerrit Dou from the early to mid-1630s. Nevertheless, Dou's painterly techniques are more nuanced than those evident in this work, as can be seen in a comparison with Dou's *Astronomer* (*Heraclitus*?), ca. 1631–32, in the Hermitage **(fig 1)**, where the same model is depicted. Instead of the blended and smooth brushwork and linear definition of features evident in *Elderly Man*, in the Hermitage painting Dou used careful parallel hatchings to help enliven the astronomer's face. Indeed, the glint of light off the sitter's forehead in *Elderly Man* is more akin to the reflections off hard, inanimate surfaces in Dou's *Still Life with Globe, Lute, and Books*, ca. 1635 **(fig 2)**, than in his images of living individuals.

The model for this *tronie*, who appears in multiple paintings and etchings by Dou, Jan Lievens (1607–74), and Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) around 1630, was well-known in the Leiden artistic community.[1] He is, for example, seen in Rembrandt's etching, *Bust of an Old Man*, 1630 **(fig 3)**. This man also sat for Lievens, as is evident in that master's *Head of an Old Man,* ca. 1629, in the National Gallery of Ireland **(fig 4)**.[2] Since the late nineteenth century, this model has often been identified as Rembrandt's father.[3] However, a drawing in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (inv. WA1855.11), of a bearded old man bearing the inscription "HARMAN GERRITS" and signed by Rembrandt ("van de Rhijn"), depicts an elderly man whose features clearly differ from those of the sitter in the Leiden Collection work.[4]

A more likely identification of the model comes from documentation related to another painting in which he appears: Jan Lievens's *Old Man Holding a Skull*, ca. 1630 **(fig 5)**. As Lloyd DeWitt has noted, this painting is listed in the 1640 inventory of Jan Jansz. Orlers as "the keeper of the Almshouse with a Skull in his hand" that was "painted from life."[5] Two archival documents reveal that in 1629 and 1631 the financial officer (*rentmeester*) of the Sint Catharina Gasthuys in Leiden was named Jan van Heussen, who resided in the "Rijn" district of town.[6] An engraved portrait *Jan van Heussen at the Age of 27* by Hendrick Goltzius, dated ca. 1581 **(fig 6)**, sufficiently resembles the model—including early baldness and the heavy lidded eyes—to suggest that the model for this *tronie* may have been Jan van Heussen, who

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gerrit Dou, *Astronomer (Heraclitus?)*, ca. 1628, oil on panel, 38.5 x 31 cm, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, inv. 1012



Fig 2. Gerrit Dou, *Still Life with Globe, Lute, and Books*, ca. 1635, oil on panel, 22.5 x 30 cm, private collection, Montreal



Fig 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Bust of an Old man,* 1630, etching, 11.8 x 9.7 cm, Rijksprentenkabinet RP-P-OB-590

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would have been seventy-five years old in 1629.[7] Regardless of the man's identity, his distinctive features inspired Rembrandt, Lievens and Dou, and other unidentified artists from Leiden, to repeatedly use him as a model for *tronies* and in a number of multifigure compositions.[8]

- Henriette Rahusen, 2017



Fig 4. Jan Lievens, *Head of an Old Man*, ca.1629, oil on panel, 59.7 x 48 cm. unframed, National Gallery of Ireland Collection, Photo © National Gallery of Ireland



Fig 5. Jan Lievens, *An Old Man Holding a Skull*, ca. 1625–30, oil on panel, 61.6 x 48.3 cm, private collection



Fig 6. Hendrick Goltzius, *Jan van Heussen at the Age of 27*, ca. 1581, engraving, 4.8 x 3.5 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, inv. P.7330-R, Hollstein (English) H 196

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Endnotes

1. For the close working relationship between Rembrandt, Lievens, and Dou, see Ronni Baer, "The Life and Art of Gerrit Dou," in Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle, 2000), 28–30. Painted works by Dou in which the same model appears, other than *Astronomer* (*Heraclitus*?), include *The Tooth-Puller*, ca. 1630–35 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), and *Old Man Lighting a Pipe*, ca. 1635 (private collection, England). Examples in which this figure appears in etchings by Lievens include *Bust of an Old Man* (Hollstein Dutch 51-2(2); Rijksprentenkabinet, RP-P-OB-12.577) and *Bust of an Old man in a Fur Cap* (Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-12.557), both ca. 1631.
2. My thanks to Dominique Surh for drawing my attention to the similarity of Lievens's painting in Dublin and *Elderly Man*.
3. Emile Michel, "La Jeunesse de Rembrandt, 3e article," in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (August 1890): 159–60. For more on the early discussion about the identity of the male model, see Arthur M. Hind, "The Portraits of Rembrandt's Father," *Burlington Magazine* 8, no. 36 (1906): 426–27, 430–31.
4. The inventory number of the drawing in the Ashmolean Museum is: WA1855.11. Rembrandt's father, Harmen Gerritsz van Ryn (ca. 1568–1630), was a malt miller in Leiden. Peter Schatborn has argued that the old man in the Ashmolean drawing is indeed Rembrandt's father because the ink used in the drawing is also used for the inscription. See Christiaan Vogelaar and Gerbrand Korevaar, *Rembrandt's Mother: Myth and Reality* (Zwolle, 2005), 189–90, no. 59. The inscription is deemed contemporary with the drawing, which means that Rembrandt did leave us a drawn portrait of his father. The same old man with the bulbous nose appears as *Man Trimming a Quill*, ca. 1627–28, by Jan Lievens (formerly Kisters Collection, Kreuzlingen). See Vogelaar and Korevaar, *Rembrandt's Mother*, 150, fig. 108.
5. "…de Coster van het Gasthuys met een Dootshooft inden arm." See: R. E. O. Ekkart and M. L. Wurfbain, eds., *Geschildert tot Leyden anno 1626* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) (Leiden, 1976), 18; also Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed. *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2008), 124–25, no. 122, repro. In pose and use of the same model, Lievens's *Old Man Holding a Skull* seems directly related to his etching *Bust of an Old Man* (Hollstein Dutch 51-2(2); Rijksprentenkabinet, RP-P-OB-12.577) mentioned above.
6. For Van Heussen as *rentmeester*, see the inventory of the Sint Catharinagasthuys, Regionaal Archief Leiden, Gasthuizen, arch. 504, inv. I.1.3.26 and 27. For his residency in the Rijn neighborhood, see RAL, arch. 501A, inv. 1318, 6 March 1631. The mill of Rembrandt's father, the Pelicaen (#108 on the Blaeu map), stood along the stretch of water listed as "Den Rijn" on Joan Blaeu's detailed map of Leiden of 1649. This indicates that the patronym of both Harmen Gerritsz as well as Rembrandt came from the location of the family's mill: both were "van den Rijn" ("from the Rijn"). In 1622, the Lievens family

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lived closer to the center of town, in the Pieterskerk Choorsteeg (#87 on the Blaeu map).

7. From at least 18 June 1580 to 15 November 1597, Jan Cornelisz van Heussen is identified as the *Schout tot Noordwijk* (sheriff) in two notarial records in the Leiden city archives. The office of *Schout* would have been held by a well-respected member of the local elite. Noordwijk is a village 7.5 miles northwest of Leiden, Noordwijkerhout is a suburb of Noordwijk. Archief Leiden, nr. 0506, inv. 9, folio 150 (1580) and nr. 0506, inv. 61, folio 184v (1597).
8. Examples include *Bust of an Old Man*, 1630, in the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, and *Study of an Old Man*, 1630–31, in the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague, both by Rembrandt; and Jan Lievens's *Tric-Trac Players in an Inn*, ca. 1624 (Spier Collection, Cape Town) and "*Sultan Soliman*", ca. 1629–31 (Gemäldegalerie, Potsdam). For these works, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed. *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2008), 86, fig. 2, and 118–19, no. 19.

Provenance

- Private collection, The Netherlands [Marina Aarts, Amsterdam, 2006].
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- Leiden, Lakenhal Museum, "Gerrit Dou: The Leiden Collection from New York," 9 March–31 August 2014 [lent by the present owner].
- Kingston, Queen's University, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, "Leiden circa 1630: Rembrandt Emerges," 24 August–1 December 2019; Edmonton, Art Gallery of Alberta, 7 March–27 September, 2020; Regina, MacKenzie Art Gallery, 5 December 2020–21 February 2021; Hamilton, Art Gallery of Hamilton, 13 March–30 May 2021, no. 15 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H'ART Museum, "From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, "Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

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- Coutré, Jacquelyn N., Ed. *Leiden circa 1630: Rembrandt Emerges*. Exh. cat. Kingston, Agnes Etherington; Edmonton, Art Gallery of Alberta; Hamilton, Art Gallery of Hamilton. Kingston, 2019, 186-89, no. 15.
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Versions

Related Print

1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Bust of an Old Man*, 1630, etching, 11.8 x 9.7 cm, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-OB-590.

Technical Summary

The painting is executed on a composite panel comprised of two vertically grained and oriented oak planks, stemming from different trees of Baltic origin, felled between 1611 and 1620.[1] The vertical join is located (ca. 20.5 cm from the left edge) through the center of the composition, directly through the sitter’s face. A portion of the left plank has been previously planed and is lighter in color. Two rectangular 3.5 cm H x 6 cm W, horizontally grained, rectangular wooden cleats have been adhered to the upper and center portions of the panel join with a radio-opaque adhesive. There are thin remnants of a third cleat along the lower portion of the panel join.

There are wide, shallow bevels along all four edges. The panel has a very slight convex warp when viewed from the front and is of slightly varying thickness, ranging from 0.3 to 0.5 cm. In addition, a narrow bevel along the entire width of the reverse of the lower edge is the result of the composite panel being prepared for tree ring analyses by Dr. Peter Klein in September 2006 and by Ian Tyers in November 2010.

There are no wax seals, panel maker’s marks or import stamps.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied and the oil (est.) paint has been built up in successive thin layers. Both the paint and ground spill over onto the thickness of the panel edges slightly along all four edges.

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No underdrawing is evident in infrared photography at 780, 750, or 1000 nanometers, and there are no pentimenti or compositional changes visible in the X-radiograph or infrared images.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

Damar varnish was thinly and evenly applied by brush in 2006 and by spray in July 2008.[2] It has a satin finish and saturates the image.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. According to Ian Tyers dendrochronology report dated November 2010.
2. According to Nancy Krieg's private conservation treatment notes and discussions with Nancy Krieg's former assistant Kirsten Younger, who treated this painting.

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